

EXAMINING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS' SERVICES TO VETERANS

FIELD HEARING

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CONTENTS

November 4, 2013

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Examining Higher Education Institutions' Services To Veterans | 1 |
| OPENING STATEMENTS | |
| Hon. Bill Flores, Chairman, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity (EO) | 1 |
| Hon. Mark Takano, Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity (EO) | 2 |
| Hon. Gloria Negrete McLeod, U.S. House of Representatives | 3 |
| WITNESSES | |
| Dr. Cynthia Azari, Interim Chancellor, Riverside Community College District | 3 |
| Prepared Statement of Dr. Azari | 24 |
| Executive Summary of Dr. Azari | 25 |
| Dr. Steven G. Brint, Vice-Provost, Undergraduate Education, University of California, Riverside | 5 |
| Prepared Statement of Dr. Brint | 26 |
| Pamela Daly, Campus President, DeVry University - San Diego | 7 |
| Prepared Statement of Ms. Daly | 28 |
| Albert R. Renteria, Member, Small Business Taskforce, The American Legion | 13 |
| Prepared Statement of Mr. Renteria | 32 |
| Sherrod Conyers, California Delegate, National Legislative Committee, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States | 15 |
| Prepared Statement of Mr. Conyers | 34 |
| Marques Dredd, Former President, Veterans Club, Riverside City College | 18 |
| Prepared Statement of Mr. Dredd | 35 |
| STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD | |
| Student Veterans of America | 36 |

EXAMINING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS' SERVICES TO VETERANS

Monday, November 4, 2013

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY,
Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:59 a.m., at Hall of Fame Room, Bradshaw Building, Riverside Community College, 4800 Magnolia Avenue, Riverside, CA, Hon. Bill Flores [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Flores, Takano, and Negrete McLeod.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BILL FLORES

Mr. FLORES. Good morning, everyone. The Subcommittee will come to order.

I thank all of you for joining us for this field hearing of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. My name is Bill Flores, and not only is it my pleasure to serve as Congressman for the 17th District of Texas, which includes part of the communities of Waco, Bryan, College Station, parts of Austin and several others, but also, it is my honor to serve as the Chairman of the Subcommittee.

Before we begin, I would like to say what a pleasure it is to be here at Riverside City College, and I thank my colleague and Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Congressman Mark Takano, for hosting us today. It is great to work with a thoughtful legislator like Mr. Takano on our continued goal to provide economic opportunities for veterans.

Today, we are here to examine and highlight programs, policies and benefits that lead to educational success for student veterans. Educational success for student veterans can take many forms. We all know that a 4-year college degree is not necessarily right for everyone, and with American companies continually begging for a skilled workforce due to the so-called skills gap, our Nation's community colleges, like Riverside, are providing critical training for the 21st century workforce.

Student veteran success is not only important for veterans, but also for the American taxpayer as well. I mention this because under the right circumstances, the post-9/11 GI Bill can be worth over \$270,000 to eligible veterans, and I am sure that we all must agree that we must make the most effective use of these taxpayer resources.

Unlike many other forms of student aid, the GI Bill is a benefit our veterans have earned, and we must do what we can to ensure that they are given the best tools available when choosing an edu-

cational program, as well as to equip them to be successful while they are in education or in training.

Congress has done a good job in this regard by enacting bipartisan laws such as Public Law 112–249 to add levels of transparency for student veteran choice and outcomes. We also continue to fund VA’s Vet Success On Campus program which has provided over 80 campuses with grant funds to assist veterans in their transition to student life.

We must remain vigilant in our oversight of these programs to ensure that the VA is meeting their stated performance standards and that they are truly helping veterans reach educational success.

Today, I look forward to hearing testimony from experts in the higher education sector about innovative programs and services that they are now offering to student veterans in California, and how we can replicate their positive impact across the country. I am also very interested in suggestions that our witnesses may have on how to improve VA programs and services to our veterans on campuses nationwide.

At this time, I ask unanimous consent that our colleague, Mrs. Negrete McLeod, be allowed to sit at the dais and ask questions. Hearing no objections, that is so ordered.

Once again, I am very happy to be here this morning, and it gives me great pleasure to recognize Mr. Takano for his opening remarks.

Mr. Takano?

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MARK TAKANO

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome you and everyone from Washington, D.C. to Riverside, California. I also want to thank President Azari, Chancellor of Riverside Community College District, and her staff for providing us the Hall of Fame Room here at Riverside City College.

Finally, I want to welcome the other witnesses who have joined us here today, and I look forward to hearing from all of you.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for coming to California. I know it is a long way from both Washington and your district in Waco, Texas. I know that you are truly committed to the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity and its responsibility to protect our veterans and provide them with the services they need to succeed, and I especially appreciate the bipartisan way in which you run our Committee.

Riverside County has the eighth largest veteran population of any county in the Nation, making this the ideal location to hold a field hearing. Chief, among this Committee’s responsibilities is to ensure that the post-9/11 GI Bill is providing our veterans with the necessary assistance, resources and services to pursue higher education.

Undergraduate and graduate degrees are becoming more and more important to finding meaningful employment. Returning veterans tell me all of the time that finding a job is both the most important and the most difficult thing they faced when they transitioned out of the service and back into civilian life.

I know that our local school, Riverside, provides some unique and effective services for our veterans, and I look forward to hearing

more about them. I am also eager to hear from our student veteran who was the former president of the RCC Veterans Club about his experience transitioning back to civilian life, enrolling in school, and working towards a degree.

Finally, I look forward to hearing from our veteran service organizations about their experiences helping veterans find educational opportunities.

So again, welcome to California, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Mr. Takano.

Mrs. Negrete McLeod, you are now recognized for any opening statement you may have.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. GLORIA NEGRETE MCLEOD

Mrs. NEGRETE MCLEOD. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Mr. Takano, for inviting me to this hearing. While I don't sit on this particular Subcommittee, I do have my own Subcommittee that I sit on. Last August, past August, I had a hearing in Fontana in which we dealt with other issues, what kind of issues impacted veterans. So thank you very much for allowing me to come. I serve the 35th district, which is just west of here. And again, thank you for allowing me to be here with you.

I will leave a little early since I already had some obligations. Thank you.

Mr. FLORES. Mrs. Negrete McLeod, thank you for joining us today. It is an honor to have you here, as well.

Our first panel includes Dr. Cynthia Azari from the Riverside Community College District; Dr. Steven G. Brint from the University of California at Riverside; and Ms. Pamela Daly from DeVry University-San Diego.

Each of you will be recognized for 5 minutes, and we will begin with Dr. Azari.

STATEMENTS OF CYNTHIA AZARI, INTERIM CHANCELLOR, RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT; STEVEN G. BRINT, VICE-PROVOST, UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE; PAMELA DALY, CAMPUS PRESIDENT, DEVRY UNIVERSITY-SAN DIEGO

STATEMENT OF CYNTHIA AZARI

Ms. AZARI. Mr. Chairman and Committee Members, thank you for inviting me to testify this morning regarding the veteran services and programs in place at Riverside Community College District's three colleges; and welcome to Riverside City College, an institution with a proud, 97-year history serving students and veterans.

When I came before you in Washington, D.C. this past June, I spoke about the current services in place at the colleges and the importance of H.R. 331, and offered several suggested strategies for helping institutions better serve student veterans. Today, I would like to expand on several points and offer some ideas that can be emulated throughout the country at public institutions serving veterans.

First, however, I would like to say how pleased we are with the progress of H.R. 331, now a part of H.R. 2481, which was passed

in the House of Representatives a week ago today, and has now been sent to the Senate. We believe this legislation, which will allow the centralized reporting of veteran enrollment by accredited institutions within the same district, will go a long way towards streamlining key processes used to serve our student veterans. As a district and colleges, we thank you for moving along this important legislation.

Here at Riverside City College, we have an established veterans center where veterans can talk with peer counselors and get educational guidance in a supportive environment among fellow veterans. We offer veteran-specific orientations and priority registration, along with a student veteran education plan. We have a district-wide disabled veteran services program and an active veterans club. More than 1,200 veterans receive these services at our colleges each semester.

In turn, this leads them directly to the classroom and into the workroom or transfer to university environment. The approach is proving successful, and the University of California Riverside is using the ARM program as a model to shape veteran services at their institution.

Of the over 1,200 veterans studying at our colleges, 67 percent are enrolled in one or more career technical classes, with nearly 60 percent of those selecting a career technical program leading directly to the workplace, and the remaining 40 percent completing Associate degrees, leading to transfer to a 4-year university. The program selections were in nursing, administration of justice, computer programming, business administration. The popular choices for transfer were math and science, social and behavioral health, and computer information systems.

Attending community college will cost an average full-time veteran student more than \$18,000 a year: \$2,800 is for tuition, fees, books and supplies; and \$11,000 for off-campus room and board; and another \$4,000 for miscellaneous expenses.

In the evolution into a multi-college district, we now budget specifically for veterans programs, separating from the general admissions and records budgets. Doing so gives college administrators a truer picture of the staff and financial resources required to serve our veteran population. While we are still in the early stages of this shift, I can report that we are budgeting nearly \$400,000 in general funds, state funds, on veteran services, excluding the comparatively small amount of \$20,000 in direct funding from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

In addition to offering traditional academic and career technical classes through our Office of Economic Development, we also serve veterans starting or operating small businesses. In 2012, our Office of Economic Development sponsored 25 outreach events, provided 1,550 business counseling sessions, directly assisted 461 individuals and 61 veteran-owned small businesses. These services helped veterans and veteran-owned businesses with more than \$27 million in contract and sub-contract awards.

Outreach funding remains one of the main challenges in implementing the more comprehensive veterans services and programs at our community colleges. Quite simply, community colleges need

more Federal funding for veterans, or at least more Federal funding released at the local level.

Community colleges are portals to the education of the majority of veterans. We can move veterans quickly into the workplace or into a transfer environment. But we need access to more funding and more services supplied at the Federal level, but administered and delivered on the local level. This financial challenge could be overcome in a fashion similar to how the VA is already implementing broad improvements such as the Benefits Portal, the VRAP and VMAT. All of these initiatives are designed to create seamless access and education transitions for veterans, and each depends on the Federal-local partnership approach.

As educators and elected officials, it is incumbent upon us to help veterans achieve their dreams. That is our collective challenge. Riverside Community College District and our three colleges rise to this challenge, but seek to do so alongside all of our sister colleges in partnership with the Veterans Administration so that all veterans seeking services can be readily served.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on this critical national and local issue, and I would be happy to take any questions.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. CYNTHIA AZARI APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Dr. Azari.

Dr. Brint, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Oh, I didn't explain the timer. The green light means that you have 4-and-a-half minutes. The yellow light means you have 30 seconds. The red light means you need to wrap up quick.

Dr. Azari, you were right on.

I forgot to explain how the lights worked.

Dr. Brint?

STATEMENT OF STEVEN G. BRINT

Mr. BRINT. Good morning. I am Steven Brint, Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education at UC Riverside. I am honored to be here today to share with you information about UCR's success helping veterans transition into higher education and to be successful once they do transition.

The GI Bill provides the financial resources for veterans to earn a 4-year degree, and UC Riverside has achieved national recognition for combining access with strong support services and excellence in undergraduate teaching.

Many of UCR's 21,000 undergraduates and graduate students have stories that can make success more difficult. They are frequently from low-income backgrounds, often the first in their families to attend college. They come from an environment in the military of tight unit cohesion and specific direction and order.

They sometimes feel isolated in a higher education setting that focuses on the individual rather than the unit. At UCR, we work to keep our military members, veterans, and family members in close touch with each other, and to continue that sense of unit cohesion as they move through their studies.

Our veterans services coordinator, Chryssa Jones, sits on the Regional Board of Directors of the National Association of Veterans Programs, and she is an expert in providing services to our veteran students. In addition to meeting with each VA beneficiary face-to-face every quarter, Chryssa advises our student veteran organizations, coordinates campus programs and services, and is frequently asked to speak at regional and national meetings. Her office suite includes space for a veterans lounge so that our veterans on campus can have a place to meet informally.

Veterans have gone the extra mile for us, so let me tell you about some of the ways that UCR goes the extra mile for our veterans. We have a scholarship fund, Operation Education, that is geared to help cover funding gaps for veterans who have suffered combat-related injuries. In fact, we are currently finalizing the details of a formal relationship to streamline the process for veterans transferring from here at the community college to UCR.

We have orientation sessions specifically tailored to the needs of veterans, as well as welcome events for the veterans and their families. In April, we teamed up with other colleges in Inland Southern California, home to 30,000 veterans, for the Inland Empire College Boot Camp. We offered resources and answered questions that veterans have about how to get off to a good start.

At UCR, veterans receive priority class registration, as well as assistance with paperwork associated with the GI Bill and state benefit programs. We send out regular updates on policy and legislative changes that affect our veterans. We offer a deferred payment plan and an exemption from the application fee, and the first late fee each quarter, just to make sure that we are removing some of the common causes of frustration.

When the Federal Government shut down last month, UCR prepared a contingency plan to waive additional late fees, lift registration holds, and provide emergency loan funds to veterans and their families. We have a veteran support team with members from about 20 departments on campus to make sure that we hear from our veterans when they need assistance. Our alumni office coordinates some internship programs between students and alumni veterans.

The UCR Career Center has developed Operation VETS, which stands for Veteran Employment Transition and Success. The program is organized as a bi-weekly workshop for a small group of veterans and servicemembers. In these workshops, veterans polish their resumes, practice networking and interviewing, pick up job search strategies, and enjoy exclusive recruiting opportunities in jobs that lead to prospective employers and other benefits.

I am going to just quickly skip just a bit. I wanted to say that our campus has currently 500 veterans, and one of those is Luis Contreras, a UCR graduate of 2012 who majored in biological sciences. He credits UCR with helping prepare him for a career in medicine, and I am happy to say that he is a member of our inaugural class in the School of Medicine.

He has told us, "UCR programs helped me connect with fellow veterans and not feel like an outcast for being a non-traditional student."

We expect great things from him and from all of the other highly motivated and conscientious veterans on our campus. They have provided outstanding service to our country. In turn, we work to provide outstanding educational and social support services for them.

If you have questions, I will be happy to answer them. Thank you.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. STEVEN G. BRINT APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Dr. Brint.

Ms. Daly, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF PAMELA DALY

Ms. DALY. Good morning. On behalf of the students, faculty, and staff at DeVry University in San Diego, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Subcommittee more information on the great work that we are doing to empower our veterans to achieve their educational and career goals.

DeVry University has a long history of service to our military personnel that dates back to the 1940s, where we trained Army Air Corps instructors on electronic devices. And then following World War II, DeVry was one of the first schools approved to accept the original GI Bill.

Today, we help veterans and military students make higher education a reality with year-round scheduling, distance learning, and degree programs that provide a solid foundation for career success.

DeVry University has more than 90 VA-approved facilities, with most of them participating in the Yellow Ribbon program, including the one that is here in San Diego. Nationally, DeVry University serves over 6,500 veterans, with nearly 400 at our campus in San Diego, about half of our population. We attribute that to our unique geographic locale. Understand that we are only 10 miles away from 10 military bases and 25,000 military servicemembers.

To make DeVry University education more affordable for active-duty military and their spouses, these students receive special tuition rates. We also provide veterans with tuition grants, and veterans and servicemembers alike can qualify for credits based on their military coursework as we follow the American Council on Education Military Guide.

We also participate in the Department of Veteran Affairs' Principles for Excellence program, and DeVry University is a member of the Service Members Opportunity Colleges Consortium, as well as the SOCS degree network system.

DeVry University has a dedicated military affairs team. It is comprised of former servicemembers, veterans, reservists, spouses, that provide ongoing support to the veterans and active-duty members throughout their education. We also have student success coaches who closely assist military students to complete education plans, identify potential barriers to success, and to obtain resources to overcome those barriers and assist them with registration from semester to semester.

We offer our staff sensitivity training through the VA and provide the VA Vet Centers open access to the campus, allowing for

free communication with veterans and early identification of issues that they might face.

A prospective student goes through a pre-screening with a military education liaison who is a member of the Military Affairs Team and is typically the veteran's initial contact. They then meet in our comprehensive interview with an admissions advisor. The advisor explains the interview is a two-way process. We are interviewing the candidate, and they are also interviewing us to ensure that this is the right choice for their educational and career goals.

DeVry University has resources in place to help our military students transition to school and work through the challenges that they face. The program is called the DeVry ASPIRE program. It provides confidential and free counseling services 24/7 to all enrolled students and their family members, and it helps them with things such as financial and legal consultation and referrals, mental/emotional/behavioral issues, PTSD, child care issues, family concerns, anything that might create an obstacle to the student's success in their degree program.

On campus, we have a veterans Resource Center that is dedicated space for veterans to find military resources and contacts, including an advisor to again help them who is dedicated to military-oriented problems and challenges.

The San Diego campus has hosted military educator forums in collaboration with local ESOs and created and promoted designated military job fair opportunities.

To further support veteran students, DeVry University has an active veteran community at many of our campuses, and at San Diego, we have just initiated the Student Veteran Association, which will be having its first meeting in January.

We have quarterly town halls that are hosted by the Military Affairs Team, and military appreciation events for Memorial Day and Veterans Day that are hosted on campus.

There is really so much more that I would love to tell you about DeVry University and our commitment to serving and supporting our military students, but I realize my time here today is limited, and I want to thank the Committee again for the opportunity to share some of these best practices and to answer any questions. Thank you.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF PAMELA DALY APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Ms. Daly.

I thank the panel for their testimony, and I will recognize myself for 5 minutes for questions to begin.

But before I do that, I would like to recognize that Congresswoman Grace Napolitano has a representative here.

Hector, would you stand up?

Hector Elizalde—did I get that close? Okay, good—is here, so I want to thank Congresswoman Napolitano for having someone here to join us today.

My first question is this. This is for each of you. What recommendations do each of you have for Congress on how we can help you assist the student veterans better?

We will just start in the same order that you testified, if that is okay. Dr. Azari?

Ms. AZARI. Thank you. If we were able to access Federal funds similar to Title V or Title III, even if it is a competitive process, we would be able to use those funds to provide more services to veterans. We really had to squeeze it out of our general funds in order to set up a veteran center. But we would be able to provide a lot more services, and especially in our Office of Economic Development, because we are helping veterans who are interested in being entrepreneurs and setting up their own small businesses.

So, I think, not only the veteran center, but to help us provide a veterans entrepreneurship program that would really help them set up their own small businesses.

Mr. FLORES. And did you say those should be awarded on a competitive basis?

Ms. AZARI. I am fine with being on a competitive basis.

Mr. FLORES. Okay, okay.

Dr. Brint?

Mr. BRINT. Yes. I think that one of the issues on campus is the advising situation for veterans. Veterans sometimes feel a bit lost on a large university campus. It would be very helpful to us to have more intrusive advising so that we can give them as much feedback as they need. Also, it would be extremely helpful if we could do more to connect the veterans with veteran-friendly employers in the communities. This would perhaps require some additional funds from Congress, but I think competition, I would agree, is something that we would favor.

Mr. FLORES. Okay. I like the terminology on intrusive advising.

By the way, before we go on, I would like to thank UC Riverside for what you did to accommodate veterans during the government shutdown by making emergency loans available to them. I appreciate what you all do.

Ms. Daly?

Ms. DALY. Well, I want to say, first of all, thank you for the step forward with the JST, the Joint Services Transcript, which is now merging all of the different branches into a unified transcribing format, which has been extremely helpful in evaluating our veterans' transfer credits, and also that they are now available online, which is a wonderful thing, because we can get them pretty quickly, within 24 hours. So that helps us better serve our servicemembers as they come to school.

I think the one thing that we have sometimes faced, some challenge, with a little bit differently from my colleagues, who have expressed some great concerns, is that the voice between who the servicemember speaks to and who the university speaks to aren't always on the same page. There is a little bit of a disconnect between the messaging that a servicemember gets and what the university is being told. So maybe just more of a cohesive message, one voice that is represented to the servicemembers as well as to the universities.

Mr. FLORES. Okay.

This question is for Dr. Azari and Dr. Brint. The VA runs a program called the Veteran Success On Campus program, which places a certified vocational rehab counselor on campuses as a way

to assist veterans with VA benefits and transition issues. Has either your district or your campus heard or applied to this program?

Ms. AZARI. No, we have not.

Mr. FLORES. Okay. Well, if you don't mind, we will spend a few minutes with you afterwards, or John will. If you haven't, I would suggest you take a look at it. From what we have learned, it is a great opportunity for schools to get a trained VA employee on their campus.

Ms. AZARI. Right. Thank you.

Mr. BRINT. That does sound like a wonderful opportunity, and we have not taken advantage of it either at this point.

Mr. FLORES. Okay. It does sort of get to what you were talking about as far as—I was going to say aggressive counseling or advising, but there might be a way to partner with each other so that you could use a VA counselor on your campus to help with that.

This question is for each of you. There has been a lot of talk in the higher education community about student success. How would you define success for your students, and how does your school attract success for student veterans? I am about to run out of time, so you can hit it very quickly.

Ms. AZARI. I think students have to help us define that success, if they want just enough courses to advance in their chosen field or if they want to transfer.

Mr. FLORES. Okay.

Mr. BRINT. We generally define it as retention and graduation, and also we should think about subject-matter mastery as well. If you graduate without the knowledge, it is not such a great thing. So we focus on how they are doing in the classroom and whether they are graduating.

Mr. FLORES. Okay. Ms. Daly?

Ms. DALY. Based on graduation. We would say that 71 percent of our veterans are graduating, going through to graduation in about 2.6 years.

Mr. FLORES. My time has just about expired. I thank each of you for your answers. And again, I thank each of you for your testimony today.

I am going to recognize Mr. Takano for 5 minutes for any questions he may have.

Mr. TAKANO. My question is for Ms. Daly.

Ms. Daly, you heard that Riverside Community College devotes about \$400,000 out of its own budget for programs specifically targeting veterans. Is there any similar kind of budget line item at DeVry?

Ms. DALY. That is a really good question. I don't think I am qualified to answer that question at this time, but I could get back to you with that information.

Mr. TAKANO. Okay. Are you mainly career and technical programs, do you also have transfer programs into 4-year programs?

Ms. DALY. We are Associate, Bachelor's, and Master's degree programs.

Mr. TAKANO. So you offer Bachelor's and Master's programs?

Ms. DALY. Yes, and we primarily have transfer-in students, so those finishing community college and transferring in. Usually

about 40 credits is a transfer in from our military folks into DeVry University.

Mr. TAKANO. I want to just compare costs between the two. I think Dr. Azari mentioned about \$18,000 a year is the cost if the student—it costs an average full-time student, a veteran, \$18,000 a year. Do you have a comparable cost number?

Ms. DALY. Well, for veterans, it is a little bit different because of the Yellow Ribbon program. So whatever the program covers, that is what we are charging the veteran to attend. So there is no out-of-pocket above and beyond their scholarships and their funding. So, does that answer your question, sir?

Mr. TAKANO. The cost is funded by the government. My question is, what is the cost for a student to attend DeVry, whether a veteran or not?

Ms. DALY. A non-veteran student would be about \$16,000 a year in tuition.

Mr. TAKANO. In tuition alone? Does that include books and supplies?

Ms. DALY. It does.

Mr. TAKANO. Okay. Does it include off-campus board?

Ms. DALY. No. We have primarily non-traditional students. We don't have dorms in our locations.

Mr. TAKANO. Okay.

Dr. Azari, tell me more about the veteran center that RCC created. Why was it created? How was it funded? And what is the size of its budget?

Ms. AZARI. We have a veteran center. It is a student engagement center. So there is a back office that provides assistance with paperwork, but the bulk of the center, the major portion there is a television, there are computers, there are study areas, and there is a sofa and a comfort area so that students can connect with other veteran students. I don't have the cost for their budget, but let me see if Joy does.

Okay. Like I said, we spend about \$400,000. Normally, what we do, Riverside City College gets about half of that, so that is about \$200,000, and the other colleges get 25 percent of 25 percent. So I would say \$100,000. That includes tapping.

Mr. TAKANO. Great. And is it able to fully serve the veteran population at RCC?

Ms. AZARI. We do the best that we can. We are open every day, and there is staff located in the offices every day.

Mr. TAKANO. What are the greatest challenges you face in attracting and serving veterans?

Ms. AZARI. I think getting the message out and communicating that we have services for veterans and that we will provide that assistance.

Mr. TAKANO. Has your research office been able to determine any differences in their success rate compared to the regular student body?

Ms. AZARI. Not to my knowledge, but that would be helpful.

Mr. TAKANO. One more thing. Do veterans have issues with preparation? Are they arriving at college level? Is there an overall sense you can give me on this?

Ms. AZARI. Eighty percent of community college students in California come in with deficiencies, either in English or math. So I am certain that we have identified those, and then we provide the remediation.

Mr. TAKANO. Okay. Can you answer that question, Ms. Daly? Are there similar issues of preparation, and is there any screening that you do, or assessments?

Ms. DALY. Yes. Assessments are required for admission. Like my colleague, we are experiencing the same kinds of challenges with remedial coursework required. I would say with our veteran population and military folks, the English is there. The verbal and written primarily is not nearly the challenge. But we do require college algebra, which if you don't use it, you kind of lose it. So there is a remedial kind of revisit to that to kind of brush up on those skill sets.

Mr. TAKANO. All right. I think my time is about to run out, and I yield back.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Mr. Takano.

Mrs. Negrete McLeod, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. NEGRETE MCLEOD. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For all of you, all the community colleges have veteran centers, and each community college in my district, and my district serves three community colleges, which is Valley, Mount Sac and Chaffey, and everybody claims to have the best veteran center. Since you all have the best veteran center, do you all—and you have all used the term “best practices.” Do you all kind of coordinate with each other to see what is the best practice for everybody, even for the universities, since you also have the best veteran center?

Ms. AZARI. I would say yes, that we do, certainly among the community colleges in California. We have regular meetings of individuals who work with veterans. There are also national meetings where we get together and talk about those things.

But I can tell you that when I was at Riverside City College last fall, we did have visitors from the University of California Riverside to come look at our veteran center because they wanted to expand their program. So I know that we have some best practices.

Mr. BRINT. I would say the national —

Mrs. NEGRETE MCLEOD. Because I also have Cal Poly in my district. So, everybody has the best. So I just wanted to know do you do the same thing?

Mr. BRINT. I won't make a claim about who has the best, but we certainly attend the national meetings. We are attentive to the practices of all the universities. We attempt to emulate the practices that are working. And one thing that is distinctive about our university is, we evaluate what we do and we look very carefully at how the veterans are looking at our services, whether they feel they are benefitting from our services. We track their progress, and we are constantly trying to direct resources and sometimes redesign programs to best fit the needs of our populations.

Ms. DALY. I would say yes, within our sector. Again, like my colleagues, within the private sector, we have meetings that kind of discuss the veteran challenges, successes, best practices, ways to improve. One of the ways that we measure the outcome is through what we call a promoter score or student satisfaction rate, and the

University of San Diego is well above—into the 50s, which is considered the top tier of satisfaction rate. So that is how we know we are doing well, and persistence is strong to graduation. Those are the ways that we measure how well we are doing.

Mrs. NEGRETE MCLEOD. Because my district has DeVry, has ITT, has a bunch of private post-secondary schools. So do you all kind of meet together? I know you are out in San Diego.

Ms. DALY. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. NEGRETE MCLEOD. And I am out this way.

Ms. DALY. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. NEGRETE MCLEOD. So it would be the same whether you are down in San Diego or this way.

Ms. DALY. Yes, there are many regional meetings with folks from the VA kind of spearheading those and that open dialogue, that feedback back and forth.

Mrs. NEGRETE MCLEOD. Thank you.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Mrs. Negrete McLeod.

And I want to thank each of you for your testimony.

I don't have any personal experience with groups like community college does or with UC Riverside, but I do appreciate what you told us today. I do have a large employer in my district, L3 Communications, that is very happy with the number of DeVry candidates they have working with them.

So I thank each of you for what you do for our Nation's veterans, and this panel is now dismissed.

For our second panel, we will have Mr. Albert R. Renteria representing the American Legion; Mr. Sherrod Conyers, representing the Veterans of Foreign Wars; and Mr. Marques Dredd, representing the Riverside City College Veterans Club. Each of you will be recognized for 5 minutes.

We also have another Member of Congress that has a representative here today. Congressman Raul Ruiz has a representative, Rebecca Rodriguez Lynn. Are you here?

So if any of you need to reach out to Congressman Ruiz's office, Rebecca will be happy to visit with you about that, I am sure.

So we will now begin your testimony. We will start with Mr. Renteria.

You are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENTS OF ALBERT R. RENTERIA, MEMBER, SMALL BUSINESS TASKFORCE, THE AMERICAN LEGION; SHERROD CONYERS, CALIFORNIA DELEGATE, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES; MARQUES DREDD, FORMER PRESIDENT, VETERANS CLUB, RIVERSIDE CITY COLLEGE

STATEMENT OF ALBERT R. RENTERIA

Mr. RENTERIA. Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of Commander Dellinger and the 2.4 million members of the American Legion, I thank you and your colleagues for the work you do in support of our servicemembers and veterans, as well as their families.

Education is increasingly essential to success in the American job market. Whether obtaining a traditional liberal education or pur-

suing a job credential, the shift in the American economy from manufacturing-based to information-based demands a radical increase in the need for higher education.

Since 1944, when the American Legion shepherded the original GI Bill into law, our organization has taken a strong interest in higher education, particularly with regard to veteran education. The capacity of the post-9/11 GI Bill greatly expanded the educational benefits available to veterans. The American Legion understands this benefit comes at a significant cost, but the experience is well worth it both for the veteran and the Nation, because it represents an investment in the future of our veterans and of the country, an investment that will pay off in spades, just as the original GI Bill did.

As veterans transition from the military to civilian life, they need education and job training in order to be competitive in the current job market. However, it has become increasingly apparent that there is a need to obtain information on student outcomes and ensure the transparency of institutions of higher learning while providing quantitative information on student veterans in order to assess America's return on investment in the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Taxpayers deserve to know how well their money is being used. But even more importantly, veterans looking to utilize their earned education benefits deserve to be given a fair deal, and deserve to be given good information that will help them make a smart decision about college.

Additionally, policymakers need reliable data when considering potential policy adjustments. Some of the specific data points that the American Legion believes are relevant and should be researched and made available include: the number of part-time, adult, military, remedial, and Pell Grant students who are successfully completing degrees; data regarding students who do not complete programs, whether they are transferring to other schools or dropping out altogether; the percentage of tuition paid out-of-pocket by the student versus the percentage the institution receives from government sources; the amount of overhead debt students are being burdened with, and whether they are paying back their loans, especially students who do not complete their degrees; whether students are finding jobs in their fields; whether students are continuing on to graduate school.

While it is true that some of this data is already collected and reported, virtually none effectively captures student veteran outcomes. Data which is reported to the Department of Education and complies with the Higher Education Act of 1965 tracks only first-time full-time students. However, veterans by and large do not fall into this category. Typically, student veterans are adults attending part-time, perhaps online, and they have previously taken post-secondary classes in some form. Changing these metrics to better capture the student veteran population, as well as the growing number of other non-first-time, full-time students in higher education, would be a step in the right direction.

Further, data which is provided to the National Student Clearinghouse, a non-profit organization that collects and disseminates current enrollment and graduation data of the vast majority of American institutions of higher learning, does not track student

veterans specifically. Because of this, the American Legion believes it necessary to develop metrics and data collection which tracks student veterans specifically, from the beginning of their higher education experience through its completion and employment outcomes.

Finally, the American Legion recommends more scrutiny be given to the process of granting alternative credits. Alternative credit is credit which may be granted for experiences garnered outside of traditional classroom settings. For example, students may be granted credit for successfully passing a prior learning assessment, or for military or job experience. The American Legion believes that data collating the granting of this type of credit with student outcomes would be useful in assessing the importance of this type of credit to overall student success.

In sum, the American Legion urges the embrace of outcomes-focused data systems which provide information that enable stakeholders to make informed decisions. America has recognized that veterans are an incredibly valuable resource and, through the post-9/11 GI Bill, has invested in them. We need to ensure that veterans are able to make the most of this crucial benefit for themselves, their families, their communities, and our country.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF ALBERT R. RENTERIA APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Mr. Renteria.
Mr. Conyers?

STATEMENT OF SHERROD CONYERS

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States of America and our Auxiliaries, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to offer the VFW's perspective on the services our colleges and universities offer to student veterans.

As a current-conflict veteran, I understand firsthand how difficult the transition can be from military to civilian life. For student veterans in particular, the culture shock of going from military life to college life can be particularly daunting. This is why campus resources, specifically for student veterans, have been so critical to veterans' success in higher education.

For years, the VFW has been at the forefront of improving educational opportunities for veterans who have served since 9/11. The VFW championed the post-9/11 GI Bill, which recently turned 5 years old. Last year, we championed legislation to improve consumer information and consumer protections for veterans through the Improving Transparency in Education for Veterans Act, which was signed into law in early January. This year, the VFW is fighting for in-state tuition for veterans at public colleges and universities, seeking to ensure veterans can maximize their benefits at the publicly-funded school of their choice.

But the VFW believes that we not only have the obligation to ensure that veterans have access to higher education, but we have the obligation to ensure they can graduate and find quality careers.

Recent accomplishments like the post-9/11 GI Bill and the Transparency Act are designed to ensure that veterans are academically and financially prepared to go to college, but they do little to ensure that veterans will actually graduate. This is where college-specific services to student veterans play a critical role.

Over the last few years, many colleges and universities have stepped up to improve their on-campus services to veterans, and we applaud those kinds of initiatives. The VFW echoes the sentiment of our colleagues at Student Veterans of America, or SVA, when they say that the investment of a college or university in its veterans has to start at the top. We agree that college presidents must have a vested interest in the veterans' community on their campus, or those veterans will face significant hurdles establishing veteran-specific services.

To the VFW, a model college campus embraces three basic concepts: student veterans who are organized within the student body; buy-in from top campus administration, to include the college president, through which policies are crafted and resources allocated to support veterans; and dedicated physical space to veterans' resources beyond the school certifying official.

The first concept is simple. Veterans should come together on campus to offer mutual aide, assistance and camaraderie to their veteran peers. Moreover, organized student veteran groups must make a concerted effort to become an integral part of campus life by either organizing events like community fundraisers or participating in campus events like intramural sports. The VFW has seen many successful models for this around the Nation, particularly from student veteran organizations under the SVA umbrella at more than 800 college campuses from coast to coast.

One example is at Rutgers University in New Jersey where newly-matriculated Iraq and Afghanistan veterans founded a small campus group in 2008, dedicated to supporting their fellow veterans, educating their educators about the veterans' community, giving back to campus, and improving veterans' services. Today, the student veterans at Rutgers are a critical cog in campus decision-making, and a well-respected group within the student body.

The second concept is many times the most difficult to accomplish, but the veteran community has made considerable headway over the last few years. At first, many college presidents do not readily recognize the diversity of ideas and experiences that college-bound veterans bring to campus. However, once recognizing this, college presidents are quick to buy in, ensuring their student veterans can be best served by their institution.

One example is nearby San Diego State University where student veterans made their case to college leadership who in turn identified gaps and offered services and campus resources wherever they could, such as an old fraternity house now used exclusively for campus veterans. Today, San Diego State boasts one of the Nation's most engaged veteran communities on campus and the largest student veteran population in California.

Another example is right here at Riverside City College, where the administration recognized the need for priority enrollment for student veterans. Unlike Federal student aid, GI Bill programs have a finite timeline and dollar amount with which a veteran can

earn a degree. This means that veterans cannot mark time waiting for required degree courses to open up. Riverside recognized this and extended priority registration to all recently-separated veterans and GI Bill beneficiaries to ensure they can enroll in necessary classes and graduate in a timely manner.

The final concept is often a product of the second. Last November, California State University, Fullerton, opened its veteran center, where veterans can meet throughout the day, speak with educational advisors, take advantage of peer tutoring, or learn about available veteran benefits. Similar veteran centers are also up and running right here at Riverside, at San Diego State, and other campuses around California.

Since the implementation of the post-9/11 GI Bill, many colleges have recognized the wealth of knowledge and experience our veterans bring to the community. Some of the Nation's most elite schools, like Columbia University and Georgetown, have built robust veteran communities on campus capable of molding the leaders of tomorrow, as we intended. However, there is still room for improvement.

The VFW has followed closely the growth and success of VA's Vet Success On Campus program. What started as a one-campus pilot in 2009, quickly expanded to eight campuses by the end of 2011; 17 campuses in 2012; 32 in 2013; and a proposed 94 campuses in 2014. VSOC offers VA-specific resources directly to veterans on college campuses. This program has been invaluable to the colleges that have been fortunate enough to be added to the list. However, the VFW believes this program has the potential to reach hundreds of other campuses around the country.

The VFW also remains concerned that many schools still do not fully acknowledge American Council on Education, or ACE, credit recommendations for military training when veterans enroll. Currently, Servicemember Opportunity Colleges, or SOC, consortium participants must have policies in place to evaluate and accept military academic credits. Unfortunately, most schools are not SOC participants. We understand that Congress cannot legislate the acceptance and transfer of military credits, but the VFW would prefer to see GI Bill-eligible schools acknowledge military academic credits and implement reasonable policies to accept credits where applicable.

The VFW also believes that financial concerns continue to impede academic progress for student veterans. The cost of college is a concern for all Americans, and even though many veterans have access to the robust post-9/11 GI Bill, most veterans still face significant out-of-pocket costs to finance their education.

With this in mind, the VFW continues to advocate for in-state tuition for recently-separated post-9/11 GI Bill veterans. As written, the post-9/11 GI Bill only reimburses in-state tuition and fees for veterans attending public schools. Sadly, many veterans attending public schools cannot qualify for in-state tuition because the transience of military life has made them ineligible. Since these policies vary disparately state by state, the VFW believes that we must offer reasonable in-state tuition protections for student veterans on a national level, especially for veterans who cannot qualify because of circumstances beyond their control.

Finally, the VFW also believes that schools accepting GI Bill dollars should offer priority enrollment to student veterans if they offer priority enrollment to other student groups, like student athletes. I explained earlier in my testimony why this was such a critical issue for veterans who have a finite time in which to use their benefits. Many schools, like Riverside City College, have already stepped up to offer priority enrollment to foster student veteran success, but we believe that more can be done to ensure GI Bill-eligible schools adopt similar policies.

As you can see, campus services for veterans play a key role in ensuring student veteran success in higher education. We have seen significant improvement in this area since the passage of the post-9/11 GI Bill, but we must continue to do better. We have several opportunities to get this right at the Federal level, and the VFW stands ready to assist, as we have always done in the past.

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, this concludes my statement, and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF SHERROD CONYERS APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Mr. Conyers.
Mr. Dredd?

STATEMENT OF MARQUES DREDD

Mr. DREDD. Good morning, Chairman and Congressman. My name is Marques Dredd. I am a member, a retired member of the Air Force. I was medically discharged. When I was asked to be here, I was very excited because I think you get a different perspective when you actually see someone who is going through the process, who has experienced things and seen things and seen how much we have grown.

The transition from a military lifestyle to a student can be a challenging experience. I was medically discharged from the Air force. When I returned from Iraq, I found myself in a lost place and trying to find out what my next steps would be. After many attempts to find employment, I decided that college would give me better opportunities to fulfill my goals.

When I first began at Riverside College, life was challenging. For instance, I did not know where to start and what classes to take. At the time, I felt that the veteran's office would not offer much help and I chose to try things on my own. A semester later, I spoke with another veteran who suggested coming to one of the veteran meetings. I quickly realized that there were many veteran resources to help get me on track. After attending a few meetings, it was clear that there were many opportunities as well as veterans in the same situation that I was. This inspired me to become more active and join the club.

After joining the club, I decided that I wanted to become the president. I saw other presidents before me, and they were motivated, and they wanted to be successful. When I first started here, it was a very small building, and we could basically just turn in our paperwork, ask a few questions and leave. In the past three

years, almost four years now, the Veterans Club has grown so much, it clearly inspired us as veterans to do more and see more.

I have seen veterans before me that had offices, officer positions, go on to succeed. Some examples. One has a Fulbright Scholarship to University of San Bernardino, I believe. Another got a full-time job, actually was a president. And myself, I will be transferring to Cal Poly as an engineering major in the winter.

It is very exciting to see the things that we have done and how much we have grown. I think that is one of the most important things that I wanted to get across and why I was so excited when my advisor asked me to be here. We have things in our resource center like computers. Although there are computers other places on campus, it is a nice environment to go where there are just veterans where we can discuss other things, and we truly do try and help each other. We have books, and we know that sometimes we are struggling. We may let them use our book while we use their book when we are taking different classes.

We really try and network and intermingle with each other, which I think is another important aspect of the resource center and the Veterans Club.

When I first started here, I thought veterans were going to be a bunch of old veteran guys who just wanted to sit around and talk about old war stories, and that was kind of my reason for staying away from the Veterans Club. But after seeing what it had to offer and what our advisors had to offer, it really made me excited. It made me want to do more, and it made me want to see that not only people around us, but the student population and the college would see us as positive, diverse, motivated individuals that want to be successful and are here to finish our education. That was my main purpose for going in the military, and that is my purpose now.

I didn't want to use my benefits here. I chose to save them, because I have seen how difficult the university level can be. So I decided to wait. I have used them a few times, but not that much. I have been trying to save them. Now that I will be at Cal Poly, I am very excited to see what I can do with those benefits.

But like I said, it is very exciting. I am thankful that I could be here and let you know, and if you have any questions, I would be more than happy to answer them.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARQUES DREDD APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Mr. Dredd.

I want to, before we begin the questioning, I would like to thank all of you for your testimony. But more importantly, I would like to thank each of you for your service to our country. It should not go unnoticed about the sacrifice that each of you have made, as well as the rest of your brothers and sisters who are veterans, and also your brothers and sisters that are in the United States military.

With that, I will recognize myself for 5 minutes for questioning.

The first question I have is for each of you on the panel, and I think some of you spoke to this, especially Mr. Renteria. And Mr. Conyers, you talked about this a little bit. But if you could summa-

rize, how can Congress and the Federal Government better assist clubs like the Veterans Club and RCC and ensure student veteran success across the country?

We will start with Mr. Renteria.

Mr. RENTERIA. As American Legion has been in the service since 1919, our main focus is the legislative law that offers our benefits. As I pointed out in my statement is with the changing environment of the economy from manufacturer base to information base, the level of educational requirement for us is higher than ever before, and it is imperative to appreciate data that we could gather, as we proposed, would help us better present legislation to the body of what we think needs to be considered.

So the reality is, as I heard some of the panelists before us, is they are doing great things, best things for us. All veterans are taken care of when we do that. Then we do the best. But data collection is key. We know what to do with it. If we don't have it, then we can fail you to better decide how to pass law for veterans.

Mr. FLORES. Okay.

Mr. Conyers?

Mr. CONYERS. I agree with my colleague, Mr. Chairman. One of the key things that we need to do is communication, effective communication. Like Mr. Dredd said, I am a young veteran as well, and contrary to popular belief, a lot of those old stories have a lot of value in them, so we like hearing them.

But setting an ambiance on college campuses and actually, like I stated earlier in my testimony, getting the buy-in not only from the administration, but also at the top, it starts with the president. It starts with your chancellors or your counselors, making sure that they are able to buy in, in what we need as far as having an outreach center where it specifically caters to veterans. I think Congress has appropriated some funds, and there are some, both on the House and the Senate side that speak to those volumes of allocating more monies.

We all know in these crucial economic times that here, a couple of weeks ago, almost 3.2 million veterans almost didn't receive their regular monthly stipend, per se, which doesn't even equate to what they really are owed. But making sure that we are on the forefront of all conversations when it comes to allocating those funds, especially when it comes to education, I think that is where we can really start, and that is where Congress would be when we advocate for that not only in the spring, but also in the fall as well.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Mr. Conyers.

Mr. Dredd?

Mr. DREDD. One of the important things that I have noticed, I would hope that we could change or see changes, our veterans counselor does a lot of other things as well, and as the president of the club, it is kind of hard when you are trying to speak with him. And I know he has things to do as well, so he is juggling 10 things at a time. So maybe to have an advisor that could work specifically with us, and a counselor that could work specifically with us, or at least be given more time to focus on us and improving. I think that would be very motivational and helpful.

One of the, I think, hardest things as the president and seeing other presidents is when we transfer, sometimes we don't have a

president, so we have a gap. And then we have a new president that has to start, and they have to learn the whole process over. So by having an advisor and a counselor that worked specifically with us, I think there would be more of an easier transition from one president to another.

Things like that, I think, definitely would be helpful as far as—that is one of the major things that I have noticed that has been a struggle, whenever we change from one office to another, trying to find that gap and learn how to do the things over again.

Mr. FLORES. Thank you, Mr. Dredd.

I see that my time is about to expire, so I am going to recognize Mr. Takano for 5 minutes for any questions that he has.

Mr. TAKANO. As with the Chairman, I wish to associate myself with his remarks regarding the gratitude we all owe to each of you for your service to our country. So, thank you very much.

Mr. Dredd, I was struck by your strategy of you saying that you want to preserve your benefits. I want you to elaborate that a little more. Can you tell me why you chose RCC as opposed to any other type of school, like a for-profit or a 4-year university or private school?

Mr. DREDD. Well, I am a little bit—you wouldn't know it, but I am 36. I am a little bit older. I actually worked before, and I tried to go to junior college, and I just realized that it was pretty difficult, actually, to juggle school and work and be able to do just regular day-to-day things without a real struggle. So I decided to go into the Air Force. That was my main plan.

When I got out, I knew I was going to have benefits. I knew I wanted to use them. But, of course, you hear a lot of times there are a lot of programs out there that are just trying to get that money from you. And so they make it sound great, they make it sound wonderful.

Me personally, I knew what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to be an engineer. That is why I went in as an aircraft electrician. I knew when I got out, I was going to save my benefits as much as possible. Of course, it is nice to have when you need it. So if there was a semester when I was really struggling, I knew that I would be able to use it. But there are great opportunities, like we got a scholarship, an Andrews scholarship that was donated to us that offers \$1,000 a year for a short paragraph about what we would do with the money as a veteran. That is just at this school alone, and that was really great.

That is motivating for us, and that is a way for us to preserve those benefits because, of course, at the junior college, it doesn't go as far as it would at a university where the tuition is three times, as I have learned, three or four times as much.

So that is a big reason why I chose to hold off and try to save them as much as possible, because I have other friends that aren't military that have gone through universities, and they make great money. I have a friend who is a vet, and he makes great money, but most of his money is going to paying off all that debt that he had.

Mr. TAKANO. Can you tell me, how much did you know about how much you had to spend on your education once you knew you were going to leave the service?

Mr. DREDD. I actually didn't know. I just heard a lot of people say that the GI Bill is a great way to go, it is a good way to save money. So I didn't do a lot of investigating into it at the time. I knew I wanted to get some kind of background and career. I knew that military service always looks good. I also knew that as an electrician and working on aircraft, it would be great experience for when I do get my engineering degree, and I wanted to focus on having a path, setting a goal, and knowing where I was going to go.

Mr. TAKANO. So it is just that you had tried to go to community college before you went into the service?

Mr. DREDD. Yes, sir.

Mr. TAKANO. And then after struggling, you decided to go into the service.

Mr. DREDD. Correct.

Mr. TAKANO. And you knew that you would get the benefits to be able to apply yourself more full-time at college after leaving the service?

Mr. DREDD. Yes. I knew that I would be able to focus more on school with my benefits instead of worrying about trying to find a job and that balance, which is another thing that I would like to say, too. I have noticed that a lot of veterans, they have jobs as well, and they are trying to go to school, and it is really difficult.

One of the other really great things I would love to see is more opportunities for veterans on campus to work with other veterans in some sort of paid role. It would give us an opportunity to stay on campus, and when we are not doing something, we can actually do our studies. When we are off campus and we are working somewhere, sometimes it is hard to balance that work schedule and school schedule.

That would be something I also, as a president, really was hoping to—would like to see another step in the right direction is getting veterans more opportunities not only to work on campus, but to work with veterans on campus, because that is one of the main motivating factors for other veterans, is seeing that—I have seen four veterans before me succeed, go on to graduate, go on to other colleges, and that motivates me, and it makes me want to motivate other veterans.

Mr. TAKANO. Real quick, did you have to take any courses to upgrade your skills like remedial courses, that you didn't receive credit for, when you came back? Or were you pretty much at college level when you got here?

Mr. DREDD. Fortunately, because I took some college credits before I went into the military, some of those did transfer, which is a benefit. There were some things—my math skills were actually a little bit lacking, but I would prefer to start at that lower level and build them than to try to get into a math class that I would only do sub-par in.

Mr. TAKANO. Well, great.

My time is about to run out. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. FLORES. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Takano.

If you don't mind, I would like to ask Mr. Dredd a couple of follow-up questions.

Mr. TAKANO. Sure, go ahead.

Mr. FLORES. What year did you leave the Air Force?

Mr. DREDD. I left in 2007. Actually, I was medically retired.

Mr. FLORES. Okay. And were you aware of the transition assistance program at the time?

Mr. DREDD. To be honest

Mr. FLORES. It is called TAP.

Mr. DREDD. Yes, I did know about the program, and I think a little bit about what happened is, I got really sick after returning from Iraq, and the military basically told me that I was incapable of working on aircraft as an electrician any more.

Mr. FLORES. I see.

Mr. DREDD. So I was a little bitter, I guess, in the beginning. I wanted to prove to myself and to the people around me, and to the military, that I could still do the things that I wanted to do. And so I took a step back and I didn't really want to have anything to do with it. I think once I actually got here, I realized what opportunities there were, and then I found out about the program.

Mr. FLORES. Okay. I was just curious because you had said you didn't know that much about your benefits, and recently the VA Committee has made TAP mandatory. That is within the last couple of years. We have also codified what it has in it. What we don't want to have happen is just somebody to not know what their GI benefits are.

But I thank you for your testimony.

I thank all of you for your testimony today. Thank you, again, for your service to our country.

Before we adjourn for the day, I would like to extend my thanks to the students, staff, administration at Riverside City College for hosting us. I thank Mr. Takano for being such a gracious host here in California, as well. I thank our witnesses for taking time from their busy schedules to be here. I would also like to thank the representatives from Ms. Napolitano's office and Mr. Ruiz' office for joining us today. I assume you will be here for a couple of minutes in case anybody has questions for you.

Finally, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include any extraneous material on today's hearing.

Hearing no objection, so ordered.

This hearing is adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:07 a.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

Prepared Statement of Cynthia Azari, Ed.D.

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members, thank you for inviting me to testify this morning regarding the veterans' services and programs in place at Riverside Community College Districts' three colleges; and welcome to Riverside City College, an institution with a proud 97-year history serving students and veterans.

When I came before you in Washington, D.C., this past June, I spoke about the current services in place at the colleges and the importance of H.R. 331, and offered several suggested strategies for helping institutions better serve student veterans.

Today, I would like to expand on several points that not only show the level of veterans' services possible at community colleges, but, I hope, offer some ideas that can be emulated throughout the country at public institutions serving veterans. First, however, I would like to say how pleased we are with the progress of H.R. 331, now part of HR 2481, which was passed in the House of Representatives a week ago today and has now been sent to the Senate. We believe this legislation, which will allow the centralized reporting of veteran enrollment by accredited institutions within the same district, will go a long way toward streamlining key processes used to serve our veterans. As a district and colleges, we thank you for your role in moving this important legislation forward.

Riverside Community College District has been successful in designing and putting into place strong foundations upon which we hope to build additional veterans' services. Each of our colleges provides the following core services:

1. A Veterans' Center where veterans can talk with peer counselors and get educational guidance in a supportive environment among fellow veterans.
2. Veteran-specific orientation sessions and priority registration, along with a Student Veteran Education Plan.
3. A district-wide disabled veterans' services program.
4. An active Veterans' Club.

More than 1,200 veterans receive these services at RCCD colleges each semester. In turn, this leads them directly into the classroom; and then to the workroom and/or transfer to the university environment. The approach is proving so successful, that the University of California, Riverside, is using RCCD's program as a model to shape veterans' services at that institution.

Of the 1,200 veterans studying at RCCD colleges, 67% are enrolled in one or more career technical classes, with nearly 60% of those selecting a career technical program leading directly to the workplace and the remaining 40% completing associate degrees leading to transfer to a four-year university. Top CTE program selections were in the nursing, administration of justice, computer programming, and business administration fields; popular choices for transfer were math and science, social and behavioral health, and computer information systems. Attending community college will cost the average full-time veteran/student more than \$18,000 a year:

- \$ 1,104 Tuition and Fees
- \$ 1,710 Books and Supplies
- \$11,268 Off-campus Room and Board (*\$4,518 if living with parents/commuting from home*)
- \$ 4,275 Miscellaneous Expenses

With its evolution into a multi-college district, RCCD now budgets specifically for veterans programs, separating from the general Admissions & Records budgets. Doing so gives college administrators a truer picture of the staff and financial resources required to serve our veteran population. While RCCD is still in the early stages of this shift, I can report that we are budgeting nearly \$400,000 in general funds on veterans' services—excluding the comparatively small amount of \$20,000 in direct funding from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

In addition to offering traditional academic and career technical classes, RCCD, through its Office of Economic Development (OED), also serves veterans starting or operating small businesses. In 2012, the OED sponsored 25 outreach events, provided 1,550 business-counseling sessions, and directly assisted 461 individuals and 61 veteran-owned small businesses. These services helped veterans and veteran-owned businesses win more than \$27 million in contract and subcontract awards.

Adequate funding remains one of the main challenges in implementing more comprehensive veterans' services and programs at our community colleges. Quite simply, community colleges need more federal funding for veterans, or at least more federal funding released at the local level.

RCCD and our sister community colleges are the Portals to Education for the majority of veterans. Through our mission and our direct education-to-workforce connections and partnerships, we can move veterans more quickly into the workplace or on to four-year institutions for advanced degrees. But we need access to more funding and more services, supplied at the federal level, but administered and delivered at the local level.

This "financial challenge" could be overcome in a fashion similar to how the VA is already implementing broad improvements such as the eBenefits portal, VRAP, and VMET. All of these initiatives are designed to create seamless access and education transitions for veterans, and each depends on a federal-local partnership approach.

In the same way, through the use of federal block grants or grants similar to the Department of Education Title V grants, the VA could provide both capital investment and the pathways to create vibrant, sustainable learning communities for veterans. This model has proven successful in the national Puente Program for Hispanic students and in RCCD programs such as Ujima, Talented Tenth, and Renaissance Scholars for African American students. Right now the VA is doing the outreach through a block grant type of program, letting the colleges do the outreach AND service delivery directly to veterans, so they can actively take advantage of their VA benefits and advance in non-military career and educational endeavors more seamlessly; and with proper support, locally.

Determining how to best serve veterans is a work in progress, but one thing is certain. RCCD and other community colleges across the nation will continue to see an increase in the number of veterans seeking higher education and access to the "American Dream" they pledged and fought to protect.

As educators and elected officials, it is incumbent upon us to help them achieve their dreams. This is our collective challenge. Riverside Community College District and our three colleges rise to this challenge, but seek to do so alongside all of our sister colleges and in partnership with the Veterans Administration, so that all veterans seeking service can be readily served.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on this critical national and local issue. I would be happy to take any questions.

Executive Summary

Dr. Cynthia Azari, interim chancellor of the Riverside Community College District in Southern California is scheduled to present testimony before the Subcommittee on November 4, 2013. Dr. Azari's testimony focuses on how a multi-college public two-year system provides services to veterans to help them progress and reach academic and career goals.

RCCD serves 1.4 million people living in a 450 sq. mile service area. Combined enrollment at the Moreno Valley, Norco and Riverside City colleges exceeds 33,000; 1,200 of those students are veterans. In addition, many veteran-owned small businesses operate in the region, and in 2012 RCCD—through its Office of Economic Development—provided procurement assistance, international trade, and customized business training for some 61 veteran-owned businesses and 461 veterans.

RCCD's three colleges provide a range of services and programs serving veterans. Most of these programs are funded with general operations dollars (state funding), grants, and private donations. Only \$20,000 in funding comes from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

In 2012, more than 170 student veterans graduated with degrees and/or certificates. The majority of these graduates were enrolled in career technical programs leading directly to the workplace. High enrollment programs for veterans included nursing, administration and justice, computer programming, business administration, CIS, and math and sciences.

In previous testimony before the Subcommittee, RCCD proposed five strategies that would help the VA and community colleges partner more effectively to deliver services and programs to veterans. These, coupled with RCCD's proven veterans

programs—which are being used as a model by the University of California, Riverside—and a VA focus on providing federal block grants or direct “veteran learning community” development grants to community colleges would significantly improve access to higher education and success for all veterans.

Riverside City College, Moreno Valley College, Norco College and the District look forward to continuing to work with elected officials and government agencies to improve and implement services and programs for veterans.

EXHIBIT TO THE TESTIMONY OF DR. CYNTHIA AZARI - RCCD – NOVEMBER 4, 2013

RCCD STUDENT VETERAN PROGRAMS & SERVICES

- Each of RCCD's three colleges is authorized to certify veterans to receive benefits.
- Each college has Veterans' Resources Centers, either in place or in development, to assist with GI Bill and other VA education benefits and guidelines.
- Orientation sessions are specifically designed for veterans.
- “Veteran friendly” college guidance courses are offered now. In the future, a Boots to Books Guidance 48 class will be offered.
- Every student veteran receives a Student Veteran
- Education Plan.
- Every student veteran receives priority registration and priority transcript assessment and processing.
- The District maintains a disabled veterans' services program.
- Comprehensive Veterans' Services brochures, websites, and other VA and local agency information/fact sheets and consumer information are distributed to student veterans.
- A full-time Veterans' Services Coordinator (RCC) and designated Veterans' Services Counselors (all colleges) are available.
- Student Financial Services has an assigned liaison to the
- Veterans' Office to assist student veterans.
- Multidisciplinary Veterans' Services Committees coordinate student services support to better address veterans' needs.
- Each college has a Veterans' Club. In the future, we will offer Veterans Serving Veterans mentor programs.
- RCC hosts an annual 5k Veterans' Run and other activities in support of Veterans in STEM scholarships, and all of our colleges provide veteran-oriented activities.

RCCD At-A-Glance

Service Area: 450 sq. miles

Population: 1.4 million

Colleges: Riverside, Norco and Moreno Valley

Military Installations in Service Area: March Air Reserve Base, Naval Surface Warfare Center, Corona, Riverside National Cemetery

Academic Programs: 100+ degree, certificate and transfer programs

Student Enrollment: 33,000

Students by Ethnicity:

Hispanic!!47%

White! !!27%

African American!10%

Asian/Pac. Islander!08%

Other/Multiple! !08%

No. of Student Veterans Served Each Semester: 1,200

2012/13 Student Veterans Grads: 170

Prepared Statement of Vice Provost Steven G. Brint

Good afternoon. I am Steven Brint, Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education at the University of California, Riverside. I am honored to be invited to be here before you today to share information about UCR's success helping veterans transition into higher education.

The G.I. Bill provides the financial resources for veterans to earn a four-year degree. And UC Riverside has an excellent record of combining opportunity through access and excellence in teaching.

We do not just recruit students; we are committed to their success in school and in life. That success has important consequences for the development of America's competitiveness in the global economy, and is one of many ways that a university contributes to the public good.

Many of UCR's 21,000 students have stories that can make success more difficult. They are frequently from low-income backgrounds, and from under-represented minority groups. Many are the first in their families to attend college. Sometimes they are reentering school after a long absence. In the case of military veterans, they are coming from an environment with tight unit cohesion and specific direction and order. They sometimes feel isolated in a higher education setting that focuses on the individual. At UCR, we work to keep our military members, veterans and family members in close touch with each other, and to continue that sense of unit cohesion as they move through their studies.

Our veterans' services coordinator, Chryssa Jones, sits on the regional board of directors of the National Association of Veteran's Program Administrators, a testament to the caliber of expertise available to our students. In addition to meeting with each VA beneficiary face-to-face every quarter, Chryssa advises our student veteran organizations, coordinates campus programs and services, and is frequently asked to speak at regional, state, and national conferences about veterans in higher education. Her office suite includes space for a "Veteran's Lounge" so that the campus can offer an informal gathering space for veterans and military members on campus.

Veterans have gone the extra mile for us, so let me tell you about some of the ways that UCR goes the extra mile for veterans.

We have a scholarship fund, "Operation Education," that is geared to help cover funding gaps for veterans who have suffered combat-related injuries at any time following September 2001. In fact, we are currently finalizing the details of a formal relationship to streamline the process for veterans transferring from here at the community college to UCR.

We have orientation sessions specifically tailored to the needs of veterans, as well as a welcome event for veterans and their families. In April we teamed up with other colleges in the Inland Southern California region – home to nearly 300,000 veterans – for the Inland Empire College Boot Camp, to offer resources and answer common questions about how veterans can get off to a good start in college.

At UCR, student veterans receive priority class registration, as well as assistance with the paperwork associated with the GI Bill and state benefit programs. We send out regular updates on policy and legislative changes that may affect military benefits. We offer a deferred payment plan, and an exemption from the application fee and the first late fee each quarter, just to make sure that we are removing some of the most common causes of frustration. When the federal government shut down last month, UCR prepared a contingency plan to waive additional late fees, lift registration holds, and provide emergency loan funds to veterans and military families impacted by the shutdown.

We have a Veteran Support Team with members from about 20 departments all over campus to make sure we hear about veterans who need assistance. For instance, our campus housing office provides a veteran roommate matching service for students who choose to live in a campus apartment. Our alumni office coordinates a mentorship program between student and alumni veterans. Veteran Peer Mentors are available to offer experience and advice.

The UCR Career Center has developed "Operation VETS" which stands for Veteran Employment Transition Success. This program is organized as a bi-weekly workshop for a small group of veterans and service members. In these workshops veterans polish their resumes, practice networking and interviewing, pick up job-searching strategies, and enjoy exclusive recruiting opportunities and job leads from prospective employers, and other benefits.

Of course, we offer academic and environmental accommodations for all students with disabilities. If called to duty, service members can obtain a leave of absence, and be admitted automatically upon return without repeating admissions paperwork.

UCR offers a workshop that helps staff and faculty learn how to recognize and remove the frequently occurring academic and social barriers that many student veterans face. We even have an annual workshop for our graduate student teaching assistants to help them create "Veteran Friendly Classrooms." By empowering these graduate students, we are working to remove learning barriers not only here at UCR, but everywhere that these future faculty members end up teaching.

We know that service members and veterans are at risk for feeling out of place on a university campus. We have drawn on research and environmental scans for best practices to develop these programs. Our success with veterans comes from applying some of the same practices that have worked with low-income and first generation students to our population of veterans and service members.

UC Riverside currently has about 500 students who are military members, veterans, or family members. One of those students is Luis Contreras, a 2012 UCR graduate who majored in biological sciences. He credits UCR with helping prepare him for a career in medicine. I am proud to say that Luis is now a member of UCR's inaugural medical school class. He said, "UCR programs helped me connect with fellow veterans, and not feel like an outcast for being a non-traditional student."

We expect great things from him, and from the many other highly-motivated and conscientious veterans on our campus. They have provided outstanding service to our country; in turn, we work to provide an outstanding educational and social support environment for them.

If you have questions, I will be happy to answer them.

Prepared Statement of Pamela Daly

October 31, 2013

Bill Flores, Chairman, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
House Committee on Veteran's Affairs
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Flores:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs more information about DeVry University-San Diego.

From training Army Air Corps instructors on electronic devices in the 1940s, to being one of the first schools approved to accept the original GI Bill after WWII, DeVry University has been educating and supporting America's military personnel and veterans for many years. Today we help veteran and military students make higher education a reality with year-round scheduling, distance learning and degree programs that provide a solid foundation for career success.

Below you will find a brief history of DeVry University, our mission, program offerings and other information that will give you better insights into the high quality of our programs and our commitment of service excellence to our students.

I have also attached a copy of our Academic Annual Report, as well as links to other independent studies referenced below. These reports go into even greater detail on DeVry University's programmatic offerings, teaching approaches, methodologies we use to measure our performance, and the efforts we make to support students.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this information and for all the work you do to support our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,

Pam Daly
Campus President, DeVry University-San Diego

Overview

DeVry University is one of the largest degree-granting higher education systems in North America. We provide high-quality, career-oriented associate, bachelor's and master's degree programs in technology, science, business and the arts. More than 55,000 students are enrolled at our more than 90 locations in the United States and Canada, as well as through DeVry University's online delivery.

DeVry University's academic structure includes five Colleges that house its growing list of degree programs. The Colleges are: Business & Management, Engineering & Information Sciences, Health Sciences, Liberal Arts & Sciences and Media Arts & Technology.

Mission

The mission of DeVry University is to foster student learning through high-quality, career-oriented education integrating technology, science, business and the arts. The university delivers practitioner-oriented undergraduate and graduate programs

onsite and online to meet the needs of a diverse and geographically dispersed student population.

Our History

In 1931 the original school opened in Chicago when Dr. Herman DeVry established DeForest Training School to prepare students for technical work in electronics, motion pictures, radio and later, television. During WWII, DeVry University was selected by the United States military to educate Army Air Corps instructors on electronic devices. Following WWII, DeVry was one of the first schools to be approved under the original GI Bill.

In 1953, DeForest Training School became DeVry Technical Institute. DeVry's associate degree program in electronics engineering technology earned accreditation by the Technology Accreditation Commission of the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology in 1953, and in 1957, the first associate degree program in electronics engineering technology was offered.

In 1969, DeVry offered the first baccalaureate degree program in electronics engineering technology and quickly after that, in 1970, DeVry earned accreditation by the Technology Accreditation Commission of the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology for bachelor's degree program in electronics engineering technology.

In 1973, Keller Graduate School of Management was founded in Chicago as the CBA Institute. CBA Institute became Keller Graduate School of Management in 1974. In 1981, DeVry earned its initial regional accreditation from North Central Association. DeVry Inc. was created through the merger of DeVry Institutes and Keller Graduate School of Management in 1987.

Keller Graduate School of Management received approval from the North Central Association to offer its master's degree programs online in 1998. In 2000, DeVry Institute of Technology received approval from the North Central Association to offer its business administration bachelor's degree program online. DeVry Institute of Technology and Keller Graduate School of Management become DeVry University following the approval of The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association in 2002.

Today, DeVry University is a critical part of our nation's higher education infrastructure, with more than 250,000 alumni, nearly 100 North American locations and the ability to offer on-site, online or blended programs to its students.

Veterans

As previously stated, DeVry University has a long history serving the military and veterans, and was one of the first schools accepted under the original GI Bill. DeVry University has more than 90 VA approved facilities, with many participating in the Yellow Ribbon Program, such as the San Diego campus.

DeVry University has a dedicated Military Affairs team that is comprised of former service members, reservists and spouses, who provide ongoing support to the veteran and active duty member throughout their education. Veteran student issues are routed to the Manager of Military Affairs in their respective region to assure their full resolution.

Student success coaches work closely with military students to complete education plans, identify potential barriers to success and obtain resources to overcome those barriers. We also offer staff sensitivity training through the VA and provide the VA Vet's Centers open access to the campus, allowing for free communication with veterans and early identification of any issues they may face.

A prospective veteran student goes through a pre-screening with a Military Education Liaison who is a member of the Military Affairs team and is, typically, the veteran's initial contact. The veteran then goes through a comprehensive interview with an admissions advisor. The advisor explains that the interview is a two-way process; we are interviewing them and they are also allowed to interview us, assuring DeVry is a good fit for their educational and career goals. The interview culminates into a formal assessment.

To further support veteran students, DeVry University has an active veteran community at many campuses. At DeVry University-San Diego, a Student Veteran Association is in the forming stage with the first meeting set for January. Quarterly town halls are hosted by the Military Affairs team. And annual military appreciation, as well as Memorial Day and Veterans Day, events are planned at campuses across the country, including at San Diego.

DeVry University offers the following services to veterans:

- **ASPIRE**
 - DeVry ASPIRE provides confidential and free counseling services to enrolled students and their family members, including: financial and legal consulta-

tion and referrals; mental, behavioral and emotional health including post-traumatic stress disorder; career assistance and job referrals; transitioning back to school, work and civilian life; military family concerns, parenting and childcare issues; relating to other students and school environment; and community-based resources.

- Veteran Resource Center
 - A dedicated space for veterans to find military-specific resources and contacts, including an advisor who is trained to handle military issues. Additionally, the San Diego campus has hosted military educator forums in collaboration with local ESOs, and created and promoted designated military job fair opportunities.
- VA Collaboration
 - DeVry University campuses provide open access to the local VA in an active relationship, as well as partnership with the SVA. VA counselors are also allowed to establish office hours at our campuses.
- Disability Support Services
 - Aside from academic accommodation requests, veteran students are referred to the VA for additional disability support services.

The federal graduation rate measures only first-time, full-time students. Very few veterans fall into this classification, making it difficult to track graduation rates. However, we can measure the retention rate of veteran students. This is measured from a cohort of new students in the fall semester who persist into a second academic year the following summer or fall semester. Nationally, the retention rate for veterans entering in the fall 2011 is 67 percent. This rate is higher than the non-veteran population from the same semester who retained at a 51 percent rate. At DeVry University's San Diego campus, undergraduate retention was significantly higher for veteran students at 76 percent, versus 49 percent for non-veteran students.

Options for Military Students

To make a DeVry University education more affordable for active-duty military personnel and their spouses, these students receive special tuition rates; we also provide veterans with tuition grants, and veterans and service members alike can qualify for credits based on their military coursework.

We have signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the Department of Defense that enables us to accept military tuition assistance to help active-duty service members pay for college. As part of our MOUs, we participated in a voluntary third-party review to measure military students' satisfaction and identify best practices for serving this population. A team of assessors visited DeVry University's home office to interview leaders, department heads and faculty members, and followed up by surveying students who currently serve in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine.

Their report included recognition of our strengths as well as suggestions for how we can better serve our military students. Notable praise included:

- Military students' ability to continue their studies seamlessly – thanks to engaging, high-quality nature of online courses – as long as they are stationed in a location with reliable internet access
- Our specialized training for faculty and staff, and our membership in organizations like the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) consortium, which works to provide quality programs to active-duty military students, their families and veterans
- Responsiveness and flexibility toward service members, exemplified by special tuition pricing and transfer-credit policies
- Our commitment to using student-survey data to evaluate and improve programs, processes and faculty performance
- Our Student Central service model, including specialists trained to work with military students studying online
- Robust career services that will become increasingly more important if predicted personnel draw-downs happen in the military

Independent Studies on DeVry University

There have been several studies in recent years that support the approaches DeVry University takes toward serving students and managing its own operations. Below are brief summaries:

Cicero study

An independent economic-impact analysis, conducted by The Cicero Group, tracked wage growth from 2003 to 2010 for graduates from DeVry University, Chamberlain College of Nursing and Carrington College California across seven states, including California, as well as a control group of individuals who expressed interest in the DeVry schools but ultimately did not pursue a college degree. Both groups had statistically similar starting salaries of \$25,000-\$27,000 in 2003. But by the end of the seven-year period, graduates from DeVry University averaged wage growth of 60 percent, or an average of \$42,661, compared to the control group's average final earnings of 18 percent, or \$29,224.

In addition to wage growth, graduates from the three DeVry schools reported greater job security, were more likely to be employed in salaried positions, and more likely to have a job with benefits like health insurance. And because 85 to 90 percent of graduates from the DeVry Inc. schools remain in their communities five years after graduation (compared with 64 to 67 percent for typical college graduates), the economic benefits associated with higher college degree completion rates are more likely to be felt within the community.

The study is available for download at: <http://bit.ly/DVimpact>

McKinsey report

DeVry University was one of eight colleges and universities profiled by McKinsey & Company as models of how the United States can meet one of its most urgent economic challenges: producing significantly more college-educated workers at a time of shrinking public budgets and rising tuitions.

The McKinsey report, *Winning by degrees: the strategies of highly productive higher education institutions*, cited best practices at DeVry University and seven other institutions that can serve as examples of how the U.S. can meet its higher education attainment goals without increasing public spending or putting more financial pressure on students.

The international management consulting firm says colleges and universities must produce more graduates without increasing public funding or tuition and without compromising the quality of degrees awarded or reducing access – what it calls increasing “higher education degree productivity.”

According to McKinsey, the eight institutions profiled demonstrate that it is possible to increase degree productivity by as much as 23 percent by 2020 without increasing public funding. Those high performing institutions are achieving degree productivity up to 60 percent better than their peer group average, according to McKinsey's research. McKinsey estimates the nation will need to produce roughly one million more graduates per year by 2020 – a 40 percent increase over today's rate – and to ensure it can meet employer demand for skilled professionals.

The report is available for download at: <http://bit.ly/vjQa1r>

The Pell Institute study

Citing a lack of independent research on “proprietary” education institutions, The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education (The Pell Institute) conducted a comprehensive review and analysis of DeVry University's academic and support services for low-income, first-generation college students. The study's findings showed nontraditional students at DeVry University received high levels of personal and academic support, which similar institutions could look to replicate.

The study highlighted the following three guiding strategies behind the practices at DeVry University as key to their support for these students:

- Approach support services for students as customer service
- Provide early, in-depth, on-campus student opportunities
- Establish and sustain a shared sense of community

Among the essential elements of DeVry University's support services cited by The Pell Institute are: a one-stop shop advising model, an early intervention warning system, degree progress tracking, academic success centers and career services.

In addition, The Pell Institute found that “valuing students as customers can establish an effective college success culture,” especially for low-income, first-generation students. “Students at DeVry express that they appreciate feeling valued as a customer and receiving individualized attention from the staff, administrators and faculty,” according to the report.

The report is available for download at: <http://bit.ly/DVUPELLreport>

Prepared Statement of Albert R. Renteria

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the 2.4 million members of The American Legion I thank you for this opportunity to submit The American Legion's views at this hearing titled, "Examining Higher Education Institutions' Services to Veterans." We appreciate the efforts of this Subcommittee to address the needs of the men and women who are currently serving and those who served during past conflicts.

Education is increasingly essential to success in the American job market. Whether obtaining a traditional liberal education or pursuing a job credential, the shift in the American economy from manufacturing-based to information-based has necessitated a radical increase in the need for higher education. Paradoxically, there is a simultaneous increase in skepticism regarding the value of higher education among many, given the rise in academic hyper-specialization. Nevertheless, many of the fastest-growing sectors of the U.S. economy require post-secondary education and/or credentialing. According to the Commission on the Future of Higher Education's 2006 report, "The transformation of the world economy increasingly demands a more highly educated workforce with postsecondary skills and credentials. Ninety percent of the fastest-growing jobs in the new information and service economy will require some postsecondary education. Job categories that require only on-the-job training are expected to see the greatest decline."¹ Therefore, as veterans transition from military service, there will be an increasing need for them to utilize their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to acquire relevant and necessary education in order for them to be competitive in the current job market.

It has become increasingly apparent that there is a need to obtain information on student outcomes and ensure the transparency of institutions of higher learning, while providing quantitative information on student-veterans, in order to assess America's return-on-investment in the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Taxpayers deserve to know how their money is being used. But, even more importantly, veterans looking to utilize their earned education benefits deserve to be given a fair deal, and deserve to be given transparency so that they are able to make fully-informed decisions regarding their education. Data regarding the accreditation, pricing, and student outcomes of a given institution of higher learning must be made available to facilitate these decisions, which is why The American Legion agrees with the Commission on the Future of Higher Education report, that recommends metrics be developed for accurately reporting this data, and that the data should be made available to students, and reported publicly in aggregate form to provide consumers and policymakers an accessible, comprehensible way in order to better promote informed decision-making by all relevant stakeholders.²

In 2012, The American Legion, along with other veteran service organizations, advocated for the Improving Transparency of Education for Veterans Act, which was enacted into law on January 10, 2013 as Public Law 112-249. The law requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to develop a comprehensive policy to improve outreach and transparency to service members and veterans, including the provision of information on institutions of higher learning. The law further requires VA to create a centralized mechanism for tracking and publishing feedback from students and State Approving Agencies (SAA) regarding the quality of instruction, recruiting practices, and post-graduation employment placement of institutions of higher learning that:

- Protects the privacy of students, by not publishing the names of students; and
- Publishes only feedback that conforms to the criteria for relevancy that VA shall determine

The law also requires VA to provide specific post-secondary education information as part of its effort to deliver effective methods to provide beneficiaries with accurate information regarding post-secondary education and training opportunities that are available. Considering the taxpayer's significant federal investment in programs and institutions, policymakers should demand better information about the effectiveness of higher education. Public Law 112-249, coupled with Executive Order 13607: Establishing Principles of Excellence of Education Institutions Serving Serv-

¹Commission on the Future of Higher Education (2006). *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, September 2006, 6

²Ibid., 23

ice members, Veterans, and Spouses, and Other Family Members, have been good starting point.

However, there is still much work to be done. The American Legion believes that more data would empower veterans to make better informed decisions regarding their education, and would allow policymakers and other stakeholders to more accurately assess possible policy adjustments. Some of the specific data points that The American Legion believes are relevant, and should be researched and made available include:

- The number of part-time, adult, military, remedial, and Pell Grant students who are successfully completing degrees.
- Data regarding students who do not complete programs: whether they are transferring to other schools or dropping out altogether.
- The percentage of tuition paid out-of-pocket by the student versus the percentage the institution receives from government sources.
- The amount of overhead debt students are being burdened with, and whether they are paying back their loans – especially students who do not complete their degrees.
- Whether students are finding jobs in their fields.
- Whether students are continuing on to graduate school.

Under the Higher Education Act of 1965, institutions of higher learning are required to report their 4 and 6 year graduation rate to the Department of Education; however, the metrics utilized only call for the reporting of first-time, full-time students. Thus, some relevant data is already available to stakeholders; unfortunately, this data fails to capture the outcomes of the majority of student veterans. Veterans, by and large, do not fall into the “first-time, full-time” category – typically veteran students are adults, attending part-time, perhaps online, and may have previously taken post-secondary classes in some form. Changing these metrics to better capture the student-veteran population – as well as the growing number of other non-first time, full-time students in higher education – would be a step in the right direction.

The National Student Clearinghouse is a second source of data available to stakeholders. This is an organization dedicated to serving the education community by facilitating the exchange and understanding of student enrollment, performance and related information. In terms of compliance reporting, the National Student Clearinghouse collects current enrollment and graduation data from the vast majority of American institutions of higher learning, and in turn makes the data available to the Department of Education, and various other stakeholders. In this way, data is collected and made available without posing risks to student-veterans’ privacy. Again, however, it fails to track student-veterans specifically. Therefore, The American Legion believes it necessary to develop metrics and data-collection which tracks student-veterans specifically, from the beginning of their higher-education experience through its completion: their transition into the workforce.³

The American Legion also would like data that clearly delineates the impact of “alternative credits” in the overall success of student veterans. Alternative credit is credit which may be granted for experiences garnered outside of traditional classroom settings. For example, students may be granted credit for successfully passing a prior learning assessment, or for military or job experience. Data correlating the granting of this type of credit with student outcomes would be useful in assessing the importance of this type of credit to overall student success.

In sum, The American Legion urges the embrace of outcomes-focused data systems which provide information that enable stakeholders to make informed decisions. These systems must provide the data necessary to calculate “return-on-investment” measures, as well as promoting continuous improvement within higher education institutions and training programs. These data will also provide valuable feedback to policymakers as they seek to optimize policies directed at tracking and improving student outcomes. Timely, contextual, and actionable data are vital to ensure transparency, accountability, and alignment – all of which are critical to improving the outcomes of our education and workforce development systems.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit the recommendations of The American Legion on this issue.

For additional information regarding this testimony, please contact Mr. Shaun Rieley at The American Legion’s Legislative Division, (202) 999-6881 or srieley@legion.org.

³The American Legion Resolution No. 67: *Student-Veteran Return-On-Investment Education Outcome*

Prepared Statement of Sherrod Conyers

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW) and our Auxiliaries, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to offer the VFW's perspective on the services our colleges and universities offer to student veterans.

As a current conflict veteran, I understand first-hand how difficult the transition can be from military to civilian life. For student veterans in particular, the culture shock of going from military life to college life can be particularly daunting. This is why campus resources specifically for student veterans have been so critical to veterans' success in higher education.

For years the VFW has been at the forefront of improving educational opportunities for veterans who have served since 9/11. The VFW championed the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which recently turned five years old. Last year we championed legislation to improve consumer information and consumer protections for veterans through the Improving Transparency in Education for Veterans Act, which was signed into law in early January. This year, the VFW is fighting for in-state tuition for veterans at public colleges and universities, seeking to ensure veterans can maximize their benefits at the publicly-funded school of their choice.

But the VFW believes that we not only have the obligation to ensure that veterans have access to higher education, but we have the obligation to ensure they can graduate and find quality careers. Recent accomplishments like the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the Transparency Act are designed to ensure that veterans are academically and financially prepared to go to college, but they do little to ensure that veterans will actually graduate. This is where college-specific services to student veterans play a critical role.

Over the last few years, many colleges and universities have stepped up to improve their on-campus services to veterans, and we applaud those kinds of initiatives. The VFW echoes the sentiment of our colleagues at Student Veterans of America (SVA) when they say that the investment of a college or university in its veterans has to start at the top. We agree that college presidents must have a vested interest in the veterans' community on their campus, or those veterans will face significant hurdles establishing veteran-specific services.

To the VFW, a model college campus embraces three basic concepts: Student veterans who are organized within the student body; buy-in from top campus administration, to include the college president, through which policies are crafted and resources allocated to support veterans; and dedicated physical space to veterans' resources beyond the school certifying official.

The first concept is simple: Veterans should come together on campus to offer mutual aide, assistance and camaraderie to their veteran peers. Moreover, organized student veteran groups must make a concerted effort to become an integral part of campus life by either organizing events like community fundraisers or participating in campus events like intramural sports. The VFW has seen many successful models for this around the nation – particularly from student veteran organizations under the SVA umbrella at more than 800 college campuses from coast to coast. One example is at Rutgers University in New Jersey where newly-matriculated Iraq and Afghanistan veterans founded a small campus group in 2008 dedicated to supporting their fellow veterans, educating their educators about the veterans' community, giving back to campus, and improving veterans' services. Today, the student veterans at Rutgers are a critical cog in campus decision-making, and a well-respected group within the student body.

The second concept is many times the most difficult to accomplish, but the veterans' community has made considerable headway over the last few years. At first, many college presidents do not readily recognize the diversity of ideas and experience that college-bound veterans bring to campus. However, once recognizing this, college presidents are quick to buy in, ensuring their student veterans can be best served by their institution. One example is nearby San Diego State University where student veterans made their case to college leadership who in turn identified gaps and offered services and campus resources wherever they could – such as an old fraternity house now used exclusively for campus veterans. Today, San Diego State boasts one of the nation's most engaged veterans' communities on campus and the largest student veteran population in California.

Another example is right here at Riverside City College, where the administration recognized the need for priority enrollment for student veterans. Unlike federal student aid, GI Bill programs have a finite timeline and dollar amount with which a

veteran can earn a degree. This means that veterans cannot mark time waiting for required degree courses to open up. Riverside recognized this and extended priority registration to all recently-separated veterans and GI Bill beneficiaries to ensure they can enroll in necessary classes and graduate in a timely manner.

The final concept is often a product of the second. Last November, California State University Fullerton opened its veterans' center, where veterans can meet throughout the day, speak with educational advisors, take advantage of peer tutoring, or learn about available veterans' benefits. Similar veterans' centers are also up and running right here at Riverside, at San Diego State, and other campuses around California.

Since the implementation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, many colleges have recognized the wealth of knowledge and experience our veterans bring to the community. Some of the nation's most elite schools, like Columbia University and Georgetown, have built robust veterans' communities on campus capable of molding the leaders of tomorrow as we intended. However, there is still room for improvement.

The VFW has followed closely the growth and success of VA's VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program. What started as a one-campus pilot in 2009 quickly expanded to eight campuses by the end of 2011; 17 campuses in 2012; 32 in 2013 and a proposed 94 campuses in 2014. VSOC offers VA-specific resources directly to veterans on college campuses. This program has been invaluable to the colleges that have been fortunate enough to be added to the list. However, the VFW believes this program has the potential to reach hundreds of other campuses around the country.

The VFW also remains concerned that many schools still do not fully acknowledge American Council on Education (ACE) credit recommendations for military training when veterans enroll. Currently, Servicemember Opportunity Colleges (SOC) consortium participants must have policies in place to evaluate and accept military academic credits. Unfortunately, most schools are not SOC participants. We understand that Congress cannot legislate the acceptance and transfer of military credits, but the VFW would prefer to see GI Bill-eligible schools acknowledge military academic credits and implement reasonable policies to accept credits where applicable.

The VFW also believes that financial concerns continue to impede academic progress for student veterans. The cost of college is a concern for all Americans, and even though many veterans have access to the robust Post-9/11 GI Bill, most veterans still face significant out-of-pocket costs to finance their education. With this in mind, the VFW continues to advocate for in-state tuition for recently-separated Post-9/11 GI Bill veterans. As written, the Post-9/11 GI Bill only reimburses in-state tuition and fees for veterans attending public schools. Sadly, many veterans attending public schools cannot qualify for in-state tuition because the transience of military life has made them ineligible. Since these policies vary disparately state by state, the VFW believes that we must offer reasonable in-state tuition protections for student veterans on a national level, especially for veterans who cannot qualify because of circumstances beyond their control.

Finally, the VFW also believes that schools accepting GI Bill dollars should offer priority enrollment to student veterans if they offer priority enrollment to other student groups, like student athletes. I explained earlier in my testimony why this was such a critical issue for veterans who have a finite time in which to use their benefits. Many schools, like Riverside City College, have already stepped up to offer priority enrollment to foster student veteran success, but we believe that more can be done to ensure GI Bill-eligible schools adopt similar policies.

As you can see, campus services for veterans play a key role in ensuring student veteran success in higher education. We have seen significant improvement in this area since the passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, but we must continue to do better. We have several opportunities to get this right at the federal level, and the VFW stands ready to assist as we have always done in the past.

Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, this concludes my statement and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Information Required by Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives

Pursuant to Rule XI2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, VFW has not received any federal grants in Fiscal Year 2013, nor has it received any federal grants in the two previous Fiscal Years.

Prepared Statement of Marques Dredd

The transition from a military life style to a student can be a challenging experience. I was medically discharged from the Air force. When I return from Iraq, I

found myself in a lost place and trying to find out what my next step would be. After many attempts to find employment, I decided that college would give me better opportunities to fulfill my goals. When I first began at Riverside City College, life was a challenge. For instance, I did not know where to start and what classes to take. At the time, I felt that the veteran's office would not offer much help and I chose to try things on my own. A semester later, I spoke to another veteran who suggested coming to one of the veteran meetings. I quickly realized that there were many veteran resources to help get on track. After attending a few meetings, it was clear that there were many opportunities as well as veterans in the same situation that I was in. This inspired me to become more active and Join the club.

The main purpose of the Veterans club is to keep the students informed on upcoming events, opportunities, and a place to associate with other students that have come from similar situations. As a club we strive to be recognized as positive, motivated students that have a lot to offer RCC as well as the community. We also want other clubs and organizations to understand that although we have military backgrounds, we are individuals who embrace our individuality and our diversity and value those traits in others.

The Veterans Resource Center (V.R.C.) which opened in spring of 2011 has played an important role in giving veteran students' access to resources that otherwise would not have been offered. Some examples are: quicker priority registration, access to computers and the ability to print, laptops that can be checked out on a weekly basis, V.A./AMVET officers that can help file claims. These are just a few of the resources that the center provides. Another benefit of the resource center is the Staff. They are always willing to help and provide the most up to date information to students on G.I. Bill benefits and processing the paperwork.

As a Veteran pursuing higher education the resources and Student Veterans Association (Veterans Club) have motivated me in many ways. I chose to take the position as President of the group because I believed that my experience could help others achieve their goals too. Working with our Veterans club Advisors Garth Schultz and Santos Martinez, I learned a lot about how to network with College staff, organize events, and how to provide information that can help promote positive veteran influence. Further, I understand what the responsibilities of a club are and how to make it successful. These are all skills that I will continue to use as I transfer to California Polytechnic State University in the winter and throughout the rest of my life.

Sincerely,

Marques Dredd

Veterans Club President (9/2012- 6/2013)

Statement For The Record

STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the largest and only national association of military veterans in higher education, Student Veterans of America's (SVA) mission is to provide military veterans with the resources, support, and advocacy needed to succeed in higher education and after graduation. SVA has been a strong proponent of tracking student veteran outcomes to define the success of veterans in higher education and to dispel, or substantiate, notions of low veteran graduation rates. SVA was also a key contributor, along with The American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, in the effort to provide veterans and servicemembers with greater consumer protections and consumer education tools, as evidenced by our role in the establishment of the Principles of Excellence and the passage of the Improving Transparency of Educational Opportunities for Veterans Act of 2012.

To further support student veterans, SVA has partnered with the Department of Veterans Affairs and The National Student Clearinghouse, a nonprofit organization with enrollment data on over 95% of America's student population¹, to create and develop the Million Records Project. The initiative will track the academic outcomes, including graduation rates, for 1 million student veterans enrolled between 2002 and 2010. The database will address some of the weaknesses in current Federal

¹National Student Clearing House. "Clearinghouse Facts," Accessed June 14, 2013. <http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/about/clearinghouse—facts.php>

databases and surveys to produce a more accurate estimate of student veteran postsecondary completion rates, thus fulfilling a key provision of Executive Order 13607. SVA expects to publish an initial report on the completion rate of approximately 1 million veterans that have used various forms of the GI Bill between 2002 and 2010 in the first quarter of 2014.

Accurately measuring the academic outcomes of student veterans will benefit countless stakeholders. Policymakers will have sound data upon which to base legislative decisions that directly impact thousands of GI Bill beneficiaries and servicemembers. Accurate data will also be instrumental in evaluating Federal, state, and institutional level policies, practices, and services established to support student veterans. Effective programs can be brought to scale and others can be minimized. The end result will be greater support for student veterans.

The Million Records Project is a vital first step to accurately identifying, tracking, and measuring student veteran postsecondary completion rates. It will provide a benchmark of student veterans' postsecondary success. The project will be a stepping-stone to identify areas where student veterans may need more support and it will likely lead to future research regarding student veteran persistence, key loss points (moments in time where a high percentage of students dropout), and effective programs and policies. Data is critical to empowering colleges and universities to better support their student veteran population through to graduation.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Thank you for inviting comments on this field hearing discussing the transparency of student veteran outcomes and ways the higher education community can better support student veterans. We are particularly grateful for this opportunity to provide the Subcommittee with new developments on tracking student veteran outcomes to better define student veteran success.

Student Veterans of America (SVA) is the largest and only national association of military veterans in higher education. Our mission is to provide military veterans with the resources, support, and advocacy needed to succeed in higher education and after graduation. We currently have over 900 chapters, or student veteran organizations, at colleges and universities in all 50 states that assist veterans in their transition to and through higher education. SVA chapters are organized at four-year and two-year public, private, nonprofit, and for-profit institutions of higher learning. These chapters provide SVA with a distinct perspective on veterans earning postsecondary credentials.

Since SVA's founding in 2008, we have been involved in the efforts to accurately track student veteran outcomes and to assist the higher education community in supporting student veterans on campus. In January of last year, SVA was a key contributor and signatory of a coalition letter, authored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, calling for executive and congressional action to inform and protect veterans in higher education². The letter culminated in the issuance of Executive Order 13607 and the passage of H.R. 4057, a bill introduced by Rep. Gus Bilirakis and now Public Law 112-247.

A key component of the Principles of Excellence (Executive Order 13607) is the call to track student veteran academic success rates. According to Section 3c, the Secretaries of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Education are to track student outcomes, to the extent practicable, utilizing existing administration data.³ The tracking of student veteran outcomes is critical to identifying the academic success of veterans and the policies, programs, and services that lead to higher student veteran success rates. This information will allow Congress and the higher education community to better allocate resources to programs and services of value.

However, current executive and congressional action does not go far enough. Given that data on veteran and servicemember outcomes has rarely been tracked, we remain concerned that existing Federal data remains flawed, or minimal, at best. The greatest challenge when trying to track student veteran outcomes is accurately identifying veterans. National level data on student veterans has been difficult to find, analyze, and interpret due to poor collection methods, narrow inclusion criteria, and mistakes in correctly identifying student veterans. Most Federally maintained databases on postsecondary student outcomes exclude a portion of the student veteran population while including other military populations, which de-

²VFW Hill Blog. "VFW Builds Coalition to Support Student-Veteran Success," February 12, 2012. <http://thevfw.blogspot.com/2012/02/vfw-builds-coalition-to-support-student.html>.

³Barack Obama. "Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members," Executive Order 13607, 27 April 2012, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-05-02/pdf/2012-10715.pdf>

creases accuracy. In addition, Federally maintained databases that accurately identify student veterans have not collected data on or shared information with other databases that collect information on student outcomes, until recently though Executive Order 13607.

These flaws contribute to confusing results and misleading perceptions of student veteran postsecondary success. For example, The 2010 National Survey of Veterans reports a student veteran postsecondary completion rate of 68%⁴; the American Community Survey reports 56% of veterans have completed at least some college or higher;⁵ the National Center for Educational Statistics reports the six-year completion rate for student veterans starting in 2003 was 36% with a margin of error of 11.5%⁶. It is evident that the current systems for tracking student veteran postsecondary academic outcomes are inefficient and inadequate. It fosters confusion and is riddled with contradictions, all of which masks the value of the GI Bill investment.

The lack of empirical data on the drivers of student veteran success creates barriers for institutions of higher learning. Many are facing budget reductions and increased demand for services. Without accurate data, schools may be investing scarce resources on ineffective programs.

To counter these challenges, SVA believes that a new database or system should be established to accurately measure and track student veteran academic outcomes. The new database must first be able to accurately identify current student veterans, excluding veteran dependents and Active Duty service members enrolled in post-secondary programs. Second, it would need to be able to track student veterans' enrollment at the individual level, so that student veterans are not excluded due to transferring schools or taking a break from college.

These criteria are the foundation of SVA's Million Records Projects, also known as the Student Veteran Attainment Database. The system was created by SVA in partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). It will, for the first time in history, accurately track and measure student veteran academic outcomes.

The Student Veteran Attainment Database utilizes the veteran education beneficiary information from the Department of Veterans Affairs to identify student veterans. The NSC collects individual student enrollment data from institutions of higher education and provides accurate enrollment and completion data for individual students, even if a student transfers schools or stops-out. By cross referencing the data of the VA with the data of the NSC, the Student Veteran Attainment database will show the true student veteran completion rate for 1 million student veterans enrolled between 2002 and 2010. Not only will this data provide policymakers with greater insight regarding the value of the GI Bill, but it will empower service providers and institutions of higher learning to invest in data-driven programs, policies, and services that lead to improved student veteran academic outcomes.

A number of resources, based on the little research regarding student veteran outcomes that does exist, have already been created to catalogue some of these leading practices. The American Council of Education, for example, created the Veteran Friendly Toolkit to crowd-source policies, programs, and services from their member institutions. Victory Media, who operates the GI Jobs Military Friendly School List, uses a different scoring rubric to measure and assign schools a "Military Friendly" designation.

In addition to ACE's Toolkit and the GI Jobs list, a wealth of anecdotal evidence on institutional practices supporting student veterans does exist, some of which the committee heard today from Riverside City College's SVA Chapter. Their on-the-ground perspective is extremely valuable to stakeholders and policymakers. They represent the peer-to-peer support structure that eases the transition from the military to college life for student veterans.

⁴Westat. National Survey of Veterans, Active Duty Service Members, Demobilized National Guard and Reserve Members, Family Members, and Surviving Spouses. Final Report, Rockville, MD: Westat, 2010. Retrieved from <http://http://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SurveysAndStudies/NVSSurveyFinalWeightedReport.pdf>.

⁵U.S. Census Bureau. "Table B21003: Veteran status by educational attainment for the civilian population 25 years and over, 2007–2011 American community survey 5-year estimate," Accessed June 13, 2013. <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS-11-5YR-B21003&prodType=table>

⁶U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Six-year attainment rate at any institution among all first-time beginning students," 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up, April, 2009. Accessed June 13, 2013. <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/npsas/xls/F09-VETERAN-PROUT6B.xlsx>

Another significant component of success for student veterans is the dedication of on-campus space in the form of a student veteran resource center or lounge. It allows student veterans to meet one another, provide academic support, socialize with peers, or meet with veteran-supportive staff like certifying officers, academic advisors, and counselors. Some institutions have adopted formal student veteran mentorship programs to pair senior student veterans or alumni with newly enrolled student veterans. These are just a few examples of how institutions can foster a sense of community and support for student veterans.

Anecdotal evidence also shows that removing or easing administrative barriers increases a veteran's success on campus. Priority registration, for example, ensures that student veterans can enroll in classes that meet requirements for utilizing their VA education benefits. Exemption from in-state residency conditions allows student veterans to begin their studies sooner without needing to meet residency guidelines or potentially having to pay extra tuition costs as an out-of-state college student. Policies and programs that support student veterans when VA benefits are delayed also ensure that student veterans can continue their studies uninterrupted.

Finally, student veterans have reported that when institutions invest in understanding their needs, the school is better equipped to provide support. An annual survey to understand utilization of on-campus services and collect feedback is a simple way to collect data. It can also be in the form of a resource team or veteran task force that listens to student veterans and includes them in the process of finding resources and solutions. Some institutions have held veteran panels to inform the entire campus community about the experiences of student veterans.

In conclusion, establishing an accurate database to identify student veterans and track their academic outcomes is the first vital step in providing more effective, robust support for student veterans. It is hardly the last. SVA's Student Veteran Attainment Database will test an accurate method to capture student veteran degree attainment and completion rates. The next phase of the research will be to use the data to better understand the drivers of student veteran persistence and graduation. Accurate data will empower policymakers, institutions of higher learning, student veterans and service providers to invest limited resources into effective programs that will lead to a full realization of the potential of the GI Bill investment.

Thank you Chairman Flores, Ranking Member Takano, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee for allowing Student Veterans of America to submit our views on legislation focused on supporting veterans, military servicemembers, and their families.

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